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For More Information Contact:

Dave Druker

Elizabeth Kaufman

**White Pushes to Expand Organ/Tissue Donor Registry;
16- and 17-Year-Olds Could Become Donors**

Secretary of State Jesse White initiated legislation that would allow 16- and 17-year-olds to register for the state's First Person Consent Organ/Tissue Donor Registry when they receive their driver's license or identification card.

The legislation was introduced by state Sen. Mattie Hunter (D-Chicago) and state Rep. Deb Conroy (D-Villa Park).

"Our goal is always to save lives," White said. "Thousands of Illinoisans are waiting for an organ. Many of those who wait are someone's mother, father, daughter or son. This legislation, which the vast majority of other states have implemented, is an important step in reducing the number of those on the waiting list."

The legislation amends the Illinois Anatomical Gift Act allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to join the First Person Consent Organ/Tissue Donor Registry. Under current law, an individual must be at least 18 years old to join the registry. Those who join the registry will receive a letter from the Secretary of State's office thanking them for joining. White encourages 16- and 17-year-olds to use this letter as a basis for discussing their decision with their parents.

By joining the First Person Consent Organ/Tissue Donor Registry, 16- and 17-year-olds will be giving consent to donate their organs and tissue at the time of their death, with a single limitation. The procurement organizations, Gift of Hope Organ and Tissue Network and Mid-America Transplant, must make a reasonable effort to contact a parent or guardian to ensure that they approve of the donation. The parent or guardian will have the opportunity to overturn the child's decision. Once the 16- or 17-year-old turns 18, his/her decision would be considered legally binding without limitation.

There are 47 states that have enacted this legislation including Colorado, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Missouri, New York, North Carolina and Wisconsin.

In 2016, 121,553 16-year-olds and 132,852 17-year-olds were issued driver's licenses as well as 41,250 16-year-olds and 54,362 17-year-olds were issued identification cards.

"Choosing to give life to another is a wonderful gift," said state Sen. Hunter. "I'm proud to help work to end the waiting for the thousands across our state."

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“As the wife of someone who is in need of an organ, I believe that this legislation works to expand those who choose to give to this life-giving program,” said state Rep. Conroy, who is planning on donating her kidney to her husband. “Others who are waiting may never receive their gift without those who say ‘yes’ to organ/tissue donation.”

"At Gift of Hope, our mission is to save and enhance the lives of as many people as possible through organ and tissue donation," said Kevin Cmund, president and CEO of Gift of Hope. "Giving 16- and 17-year-olds the opportunity to register to become organ and tissue donors can turn a tragic loss into a rewarding renewal and life."

"Currently, there are thousands of people waiting for lifesaving organ transplants in Illinois. This new legislation could potentially help save lives across the state," said Diane Brockmeier, president and CEO of Mid-America Transplant, a federally designated organ procurement organization serving 28 counties in southern Illinois.

Approximately 4,700 people are on the waiting list and about 300 people die each year waiting for an organ transplant. One person can improve the quality of life for up to 25 people. Currently, 6.1 million Illinoisans are registered with the state's registry.

White announced the bill during a press conference at the James R. Thompson Center in Chicago. Also in attendance at the event were: state Rep. Dan Brady (R-Bloomington), state Rep. Juliana Stratton (D-Chicago), state Rep. Natalie Manley (D-Joliet), state Rep. Katie Stuart (D-Edwardsville), state Sen. Pam Althoff (R-McHenry), state Sen. Bill Haine (D-Alton), state Sen. Karen McConnaughay (R-West Dundee) and state Sen. James Clayborne, Jr. (D-East St. Louis) who is a kidney recipient.

Illinoisans can register with the Secretary of State's Organ/Tissue Donor Registry at LifeGoesOn.com, by calling 1-800-210-2106 or visiting their local Driver Services facility.

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